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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to ascertain what is being done with black literature and black writers in Illinois high schools. A questionnaire was sent to all members of the Illinois Association of Teachers of English and to heads of English departments in all high schools in the state. Of the 1,700 questionnaires circulated, more than 600 were returned. From these, it was possible to identify 389 different schools representing every county in the state. The picture which emerges in Illinois is that there is a clear majority of schools where white students simply have no contact in any level with others who are black. It is also true that the closer a school is to the center of racial turbulence the more attention it pays to units in black literature and black culture. Representative teacher statements on the questionnaire indicate that many schools do not have blacks enrolled, and that as racial conflict grows, these teachers become more confused about what they can do to help solve this complex problem. (CK)

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Illinois English Bulletin

Black Literature in High Schools in Illinois

(English Teachers Speak for Themselves)

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ILLINOIS ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH
MAY, 1971

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Black Literature in High Schools in Illinois (English Teachers Speak for Themselves)

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Introduction

Eleven police cars were parked in front of a large downstate high school. The police and parents and students were milling about the school yard. All of the doors were locked and guarded. When I finally got in, through prearrangement, I was ushered to the second floor for my appointment. As we passed down the corridor my guide said, "At this spot a student was shot yesterday." I was told that the department head whom I had come to see would be busy in class for the next ten minutes. I could either go in or wait for the end of the hour. I said that I would wait in the corridor until the class had finished. I was told that no one waited in corridors. I was taken across the hall and shut in a room until the class was over. This experience was my introduction to this survey. It is dramatic but not especially unusual. Dozens of schools throughout the state have been disrupted by racial trouble.

The causes for the situation which I have mentioned are deep-seated. In this particular case teachers believed that the changing of the school boundaries to increase the proportion of blacks from 10 percent to 38 percent so disturbed the parents that they themselves caused unrest. At any rate how much English, or any other subject, do you think was being taught in that school on the day of my visit?

It is to be hoped that the teaching of black literature or black culture may help to create a genuine spirit of brotherhood in the minds and hearts of everyone, that it will lead to a spirit of honesty about ourselves: our own fears, limitations, weaknesses, prejudices, and motives.

This study is designed to ascertain what is actually being done with black literature and black writers in high schools in Illinois. A questionnaire was sent to all members of the Illinois Association of Teachers of English and to heads of English departments in all high schools in the state. Teachers were asked to fill out the questionnaire and to return it thus providing facts to prove or disprove some of the many opinions and theories that, especially in the past few months, have been advanced on this subject. This study is an attempt at an empirical approach to a most complex subject.

In spite of the fact that the questionnaire was approved by the authorities in the field of black literature, by blacks, and by others like myself who are not authorities but who approach the subject with an open mind, it must be admitted that the questionnaire is an imperfect instrument. A few of the respondents pointed this

out. If this survey could presume to be "scientific," it would be a matter for concern, but no one can approach such a vast area with all its literary and social implications and presume to be "scientific." Teachers' responses to the questions, for example, may be subjective as well as objective. Several teachers revealed their own limitations.

> Since I have had no actual experience teaching Negro students or Afro-American students or Afro-American courses, my answers are based solely on my opinions as the result of personal association, discussions, and thoughts — not practical, utilitarian knowledge.
>
> We are a very small school with no blacks attending; therefore, we have no black studies program. Many of the answers are merely opinions of what such programs should be and could be.
>
> My answers to this questionnaire are of little value because we are a suburban high school with an all white student body and faculty. I find myself giving theoretical answers according to my beliefs.

In a few cases where it was possible to check teachers in the same school, these teachers disagreed upon the nature and extent of the school's program. Many teachers did not react to all questions asked. Some felt unprepared since they do not teach black literature. Some did not react because there are no blacks either in the school or in the community.

Several of the respondents to the questionnaire pointed out that "yes" and "no" answers make the questionnaire an academic exercise and oversimplify the basic issues. A great many of the respondents qualified their answers by writing in the margins. Some teachers used an extra sheet or two for their comments. I should like to express appreciation for the help of teachers who commented so freely. Many of these remarks are included in the study. In fact, rather than give my own interpretation of the questions, I have preferred to use the comments of those who face the problems every day in a classroom situation.

Responses to Questionnaire

Teacher Responses by Location, School Enrollment, Percentage of Blacks

Location:	Chicago (Inner City)	30
	Chicago (Not Inner City)	34
	Chicago Suburban	177
	Downstate	344

Seventeen hundred questionnaires, of which more than six hundred were returned, were circulated in Illinois. Teachers were

told that they need not give their own names or the names of their schools. Some did and some did not. It was possible to identify 389 different schools representing every county in Illinois. Atlanta, Anna, Nokomis, Lewiston, Fisher, New Athens, Quincy, Jacksonville, Bethany, Staunton, Stockton, Roseville, Durand, Elgin, Granville, Seneca, La Harpe, Cairo, Marion, Chicago, Yates City, Bushnell, Amboy, East St. Louis, Evanston, Joliet — the list of schools certainly represents the broadest possible view of the state. It follows that this wide distribution of respondents to the questionnaire will give a certain validity to the thinking throughout the entire state.

SCHOOL ENROLLMENT:	1–200	73
	200–500	108
	500–1000	107
	1000+	300

This breakdown of schools by size makes it possible to ascertain whether the size of the school plays a part in the frequency of courses offered in black literature and culture. It also makes it possible to determine whether there is any relationship between the size of the school and the thinking and attitudes of teachers.

Percentage of Blacks:	0–10%	467
	10–20%	42
	20–50%	37
	50–100%	36

The picture which emerges in Illinois is that there is a clear majority of schools where white students simply have no contact at any level with others who are black.

It is also true that the closer a school is to the center of racial turbulence the more attention it pays to units in black literature and black culture. In dozens of communities downstate very little attention is being given to black literature in any form. This might not be so disturbing but for the fact that we live in a highly mobile society. *U.S. News and World Report* (March 22, 1971) states that 42 percent of all persons ages twenty to twenty-four move in a one-year period; 15 percent age twenty-five and over move in the same period. Preliminary 1970 census figures show that while the population of Chicago has declined, the number of persons in suburban Cook County has increased by 5.9 percent, and the population of the six-county Chicago metropolitan area has shown a gain of 10.8 percent since the last census. The population of downstate Illinois shows an increase of nearly 600,000 in the 101 counties outside of Cook. It is unfair to students to prepare them to live

only in the school community where they find themselves. They must be adequately prepared to live successfully wherever they choose to make their future homes.

The representative teacher statements which follow will indicate that many schools do not have any blacks enrolled. As the conflict between blacks and whites continues to grow, these teachers become more confused about what they can do to help solve this complex problem.

Teacher Comment

We have a school of 2000 pupils, and in the 14 years of its existence we have never had even one black student.

With no more than 10 blacks in a school of over 4000 students, I'm afraid we have barely begun to think along these lines.

I know of schools in the state with over 1000 pupils and not a single black.

Eight hundred students and no blacks.

We have only three blacks in a student body of over 1500.

No blacks in the school since 1945 when two were graduated.

Three black students out of 3500.

No blacks in a school of 2650.

We have one black student and no black teachers in a school of 950.

Two black students among 600.

None or very few blacks in Ogle County.

No blacks in Edwards County.

No Negroes in Franklin County.

I regret that I teach lily-white classes, but the job and pay are better in this suburban school than they were in an integrated downstate school.

Farm community — no blacks — total nonwhite school children under ten in number.

My superintendent and principal won't hire black teachers, our board won't stand it; and our communities don't admit black residents, just menial laborers and domestics.

Our school system does not have even one colored person. Minority groups are read about and discussed as they relate to a problem under discussion. There is little comment on causes of the problems; we are concerned with the effect.

Our school is the typical small high school in an all white community and has given no thought to teaching black literature or black culture. Although we are within ten minutes of a city which has racial problems, I am amazed when I come to school and note how far removed the people here seem to be from any concern about city racial tensions. I doubt that teaching black literature would be of any value at the present time.

To put it bluntly I live in a small farming community which is untouched — unfortunately.

Because of the small percentage of blacks, the English department de-

cided to require black literature to be read within the normal courses. The overall result was a better understanding of the plight of the Negro.

As a former resident of Chicago I find it ironic to receive in the mail this questionnaire. I am now teaching in a community that has no blacks and no particular desire to have any. Any program you are inquiring about with regard to black literature may come around in this community in about fifty years or so.

Many questions did not seem applicable to our situation nor did they cover our situation. This is a white rural area. Many are terribly bigoted because of the lack of social contact with blacks. The students' only basis for judgment is the public media.

Old prejudices of all shades and degrees are worn proudly in this isolated country school. Those who live in rural areas where the wind blows across miles of corn are content to leave the problems far away and not to venture near them. In the rural systems, isolationism is not a dead or dying art.

Frequency of Courses in Black Literature and Culture

1. Are there separate courses in black culture? Yes 110 No 473

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Yes	38 (11%)	41 (23%)	11 (33%)	20 (69%)
No	306	136	22	9
	Enrollment			
	100–200	200–500	500–1000	1000+
Yes	0 (0%)	1 (.009%)	18 (16%)	91 (31%)
No	73	106	94	200
	Percentage of Blacks			
	0–10	10–20	20–50	50–100
Yes	39 (9%)	24 (51%)	23 (60%)	24 (66%)
No	423	23	15	12

The location of the school, its enrollment, and the percentage of blacks determine the frequency of separate courses in black culture. Please verify this statement by studying the above tables.

Teacher Comment

We offer a separate course in black culture, but usually too few students register for it and it is, therefore, actually not taught.

I do not believe that a separate course in black literature, culture, or history is necessary in our schools any more than a separate course in Mexican-American or Japanese-American or perhaps Swedish for those

many whose ancestors came from Sweden, or for any other minority group. If our aim in America is an integrated society, with equality for all, regardless of race, color, or creed, why should we set one race aside and teach it separately? Why not teach, for example, a unit on modern American poetry, which will, of course, include black poets; or a unit concerned with a certain subject including writers that are black, white, Jewish, Russian, or whoever has written pertinent literature?

I do not teach black culture for the sake of teaching black culture. I don't feel this should be done. Black courses add to the separation; they don't heal it. I feel that blacks should accept the culture, the American culture, of which they are a part. This culture should include those works by black authors or any author, which have outstanding literary merit.

In our school we teach black culture as a part of social studies, not English.

This school is in a white, "Solid Majority" part of Chicago. Teaching black culture here would be accepted by the students but would traumatize their parents.

Because we have a high percentage of college bound and because of the racial tension today, our department feels a need to include literature of all minority groups — Black, Jewish, Indian, Spanish-American.

If a writer is good enough to produce *literature,* what difference does the color of his skin make? In studying a writer's background and how it has influenced his writing, this will be pointed out casually with the same emphasis that Poe's background or Twain's, for example, influence our writing. Why must all things be segregated as black? Do you teach red literature, or yellow literature? No wonder the blacks feel they must be different.

2. *Are there separate courses in black literature?* Yes 40
No 543

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Yes	6 (1.7%)	25 (14%)	4 (12%)	5 (16%)
No	336	152	30	25
	Enrollment			
	100–200	200–500	500–1000	1000+
Yes	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (4%)	36 (12%)
No	73	96	95	279
	Percentage of Blacks			
	0–10	10–20	20–50	50–100
Yes	26 (6%)	6 (16%)	3 (8%)	5 (14%)
No	446	31	34	32

The trend noted in Questions 3 and 5 may be seen in Question 4 also. It will come as no surprise to you that the location of the school, its enrollment, and the percentage of blacks tend to determine the frequency of separate courses in black literature.

Teacher Comment

I have never thought of the authors as being black, white, yellow, or red. The merit of what they write should be the deciding factor, not the nationality of the writers or the color of their skin. We include, among others, the works of James Weldon Johnson, but again not because he is a Negro writer but because he has written something with merit.

Works are taught thematically, so whereas there is no "black units" taught, there are representative works by black authors naturally concerning themes on contemporary race relations, problems, myths, realities, etc.

When one has to speak of black, white, Jewish, etc., literature and insists on dramatizing it, he is not mature. The values of a literary work are more important than the color of the writer.

It is our belief that *special* consideration is wrong — literature should stand on its own worth. The parents of our black students concur with this attitude and wish equal competition in a balanced school.

In teaching literature in my classes I don't stress the color of the author. If something is good, it's good, and one's color has nothing to do with it. Discrimination works both ways.

Most teaching of black literature for the sake of it being black is a result of unhealthy pressure and nothing else.

If Negroes are a part of the American heritage, why do they need special units? Why can't they be part of the regular group accepted as people who have ideas just like others? This special emphasis is for the birds.

We use literature produced by and for any people. We don't proselytize or play with pressure groups.

This question is poorly phrased. It presumes we teach or even recognize the existence of "black literature." We just broke out of a religious insane ghetto by finally abolishing the provincial category of "Catholic literature." Why insist we regress to another similar narrowness with "black literature"?

After going through this questionnaire, I feel that in all fairness to my students, I need to select some new anthologies — especially for American literature — to include black authors. However, I would be very reluctant to teach black literature as a separate unit.

We don't isolate a white unit and a black unit. That's terrible! Literature should certainly not be racial.

3. *Should black studies be taught as a separate course or integrated with other courses, e.g., English, History?* Separate 33 Integrated 487

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Separate	15	10	2	6
Integrated	290	145	30	22

It cannot be assumed that just because separate courses are not being offered in some schools that some black literature is not being taught. It is interesting that nearly 94 percent of the teachers responding to this question do not believe in separate courses in black literature and culture; they think that an integrated approach — one with literature by white and black authors and combined, possibly, with social studies or history — is better. Ninety-one percent of the teachers believe that it is possible to graft successfully black literature onto a typical middle-class curriculum of a predominantly white school (see Question 5). It might be pointed out that valid as this integrated approach is with teachers who really want to teach black authors, it can easily become an incidental and, in some cases, an accidental approach.

Teacher Comment

Since all pupils should be exposed, I favor the integrated approach. For those with special interest I think special courses should be added — if they can be funded.

It would not seem natural to teach a separate course in black literature.

Black studies shouldn't be taught at all.

Several teachers mentioned to me courses in Afro-American history (in the history department).

At present there is a prestige value to present black studies in a separate course.

There might be a course within a department called "minority literature" which would include other groups than blacks.

4. *Do you teach a unit on black authors as a part of a regular literature course?* Yes 189 No 381

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Yes	86 (23%)	73 (42%)	11 (66%)	19 (63%)
No	249	99	22	11

	Enrollment			
	100–200	200–500	500–1000	1000+
Yes	13 (18%)	29 (27%)	26 (24%)	121 (43%)
No	60	78	81	162

	Percentage of Blacks			
	0–10	10–20	20–50	50–100
Yes	146 (31%)	12 (32%)	6 (23%)	25 (68%)
No	323	26	20	12

The frequency with which black authors are taught as a part of a regular literature course is determined to a large extent by the location of the school, its enrollment, and by the percentage of blacks. For confirmation of this statement, please study the above tables.

Teacher Comment

My experience in a predominantly black school has been that it is better to integrate the literature rather than present it in isolation. In isolation, several possibilities loom on the horizon: (1) Students tend to see it as too repetitive, especially contemporary works; (2) it is easy to become involved in a negative approach to stereotyping and dialects. These being parts of the culture they should be introduced, however, for most students are laboring under unbelievable false illusions about both.

Unfortunately very little black literature is available for use in my classes on a group basis. Most black literature study is done on an individual basis. Many of my black students have said that they do not like black literature. White students tire easily if forced to read "black literature." Generally students think of black literature study as a "giving in" to demands that they do not think there is any basis for.

Our school has a liberal curriculum, but at this moment does not have a specialized course in black literature. We feel it better to integrate black literature into the course we now have. Individuals read *Native Son, Soul on Ice, Blues for Mister Charlie,* poetry and plays. Most teachers use poetry and short stories at some point throughout the course of study.

We have black authors as a part of the regular English course. They are integrated with the white, but are pointed out as being black.

I have not included black literature in the sophomore course I teach because it is a semester course, and I am limited for time.

I do not teach separate units on black authors, but I include studies of black literature in the regular units.

The feeling of our English Department is that all good literature should be taught. We do not teach the literature of a minority group just because it is a minority group. If a black author is good, he is taught; if a Jewish author is good, he is taught, etc.

The answer I have given to this question is "no." However, thematic units include many black authors.

We teach one Negro novel every semester. The novels we use are: *Go Tell It on the Mountain, Black Like Me, Invisible Man, Five Smooth Stones.*

We have a special unit on prejudice. In this we study among other things slanted words and slanted writings.

If I had more powerful literature to use, I would do it. I would be glad to substitute something for *Moby Dick,* which I think has no relevancy in today's world.

Each student in my senior college preparatory class has read a book concerned with black philosophy (this includes the militants) and a book of either black poetry or fiction. I am in the process of reading *Yes I Can* by Sammy Davis, Jr., to my lower level sophomores.

5. *Is it possible to graft successfully black literature onto a typical middle-class curriculum of a predominantly white school?*
   Yes 444 No 43

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Yes	257	143	27	17
No	23	12	4	4

Teacher Comment

There seems to be a strong feeling among teachers in the state that the color of a man's skin should not determine whether a piece of writing is taught or not.

It should be presented as literature not as "black literature grafted."

Is it necessary? The quality of the literature is more important in our case than the element of blackness.

It would be very difficult here.

It is not an easy task, but it can and must be done.

I teach in a totally white school but try to incorporate black authors such as King, Gregory, Johnson, and Hughes in a regular English class that has optional material.

Yes, possibly. The "middle class, predominantly white" concept certainly has to be modified if changes occur. The fact is that if black literature is to be taught at all in many schools, it will have to be worked into the present curriculum.

"Typical middle-class curriculum" is an unfortunate choice of words. We attempt to construct real life curricula!

Possibly, I suppose, but not desirable. Is knowledge really racially categorized?

Why graft it? Why not include black authors with white ones on the merits of their work and with the particular type of literature, i.e., essays, short stories, poetry, being taught?

6. *Are courses in black culture/literature taught by blacks* (16), *whites* (183), *both blacks and whites* (66)?

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Blacks	9	6	1	0
Whites	90	74	12	7
Both blacks and whites	25	19	5	17

There are some who believe that only a black should teach classes of blacks. Many believe that the color of the teacher makes little or no difference. Some blacks will say that the best, the most sensitive teachers they have had were whites. Black teachers themselves run into many problems. When they express moderate views, the liberals will not cooperate with them; if they are liberal, the most conservative are dissatisfied.

One reason there are no more black teachers than there are is that good ones are scarce. And unfortunately this situation is not going to improve overnight because blacks are not going into teaching in sufficient numbers. For example, relatively few blacks are in the teaching-training program at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Blacks themselves say that they find it easier to get into other professions where the pay is better and where there is more prestige.

The following quotation is from a black student I had in class last semester. It points up one problem we may encounter in teaching black literature (incidentally this student changed her mind completely about her teacher by the end of the semester).

So all right. I make it through that class. Then I squish on to my Black Literature lecture. I get all happy. You know like man this is about me, I'm really ready for this. I take out my little soggy notebook paper in

for real anticipation. I even claim a seat, fool that I was, where I can't see the clock. I figure I don't need to watch minutes because I'm really gon' dig this lecture. All of a sudden, in casually strolls this white dude. I, still not bein' hip to it, figure the dude's going to fix the microphone and walk. But then it occurred to me that technicians don't wear white shirts and suits and jive. This dude was clean. Then it hit me. I said to myself, "Oh no! They got the Man teachin' *my* course!" I felt more chilled than I did out in the cold rain. David, how is this white man gon' tell me about *me?* They already tryin' to tell me my history anyway they want to; I guess they gon' do my literature the same way. If we ever get free, I guess they gon' tell me they freed me. I went home and wracked.

A superior teacher is effective because the students trust him. Color makes little difference in his effectiveness. The students' trust in him makes all the difference.

Teacher Comment

We have an uqualified black teacher only because the kids demanded the board hire him. Now the students think the course is poor.

I took a course in Black Literature at Bread Loaf but have not taught any Black Literature because the board frowns upon it.

It is foolish for a white to be anything but what he is in a classroom. He should not apologize for being white. He should not act as if he were a black, or think like one. He must be himself when he is teaching blacks. Frauds are easily detected and are scorned.

I profess to know nothing about teaching Afro-American literature from the standpoint of a black, but can James S. Tinney (*English Journal,* October, 1969) feel right when he says that a white man cannot teach black literature? Would it follow that black people cannot teach white literature? Do we have to be fed to the lions to understand the Christians in Rome?

When and Why Courses in Black Literature/Culture Were Inaugurated

7. If there are special courses in black culture/literature, were they inaugurated this year (73), *last year* (57), *within the last 4 or 5 years* (43)?

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
This year	38	26	5	4
Last year	16	25	7	9
Within the last 4 or 5 years	19	13	3	8

Blacks have been writing literature in English since 1746 and publishing books in English since 1773. But it is only in the last few years that black literature has become significantly visible in high schools in Illinois. In answering this survey, 72 teachers reported that special courses in black culture/literature were inaugurated this year, 57 indicated last year, and 43 within the last four or five years. Would it be safe to assume that more courses in black literature and culture have been added to the curricula in secondary schools in the last five years than in any previous period in the history of Illinois? Many teachers also reported that although they have no courses in black literature or culture at the present, they are planning one.

8. Were they included because of community pressure?

	Yes 29	No 78
Included by student request?	Yes 66	No 52
Included to fill a gap in the curriculum?	Yes 94	No 31
Combination of above reasons?	Yes 75	No 41

Location

	Downstate		Suburban		Chicago Not Inner City		Chicago Inner City	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Community pressure	14	42	8	29	4	4	3	3
Student request	28	35	23	15	8	2	7	0
Gap in curriculum	41	19	39	6	6	5	8	1
Combination	21	26	35	11	4	4	15	0

The important thing to remember in this question is that there are forces operating which insist that additional attention be paid to black studies. Not the least of these, as you can see from the above table, is the teacher's own desire to fill a gap in her own curriculum.

Teacher Comment

What is included is by a teacher's desire to expand the vision of a white town.

Included to satisfy a teacher's belief in the necessity for such material.

Faculty interest is greater than pupil interest.

Our student body does not seem to be very much concerned this year about the presentation of black materials. Success in other years seems to be more evidenced by demands and interests than this one.

9. Is the teaching of black literature symptomatic of a coming of age for the blacks? Yes 336 No 77

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Yes	183	109	24	20
No	49	19	5	4

The question, "Is the teaching of black literature symptomatic of the coming age for the blacks?" was challenged by two or three correspondents who may think that blacks have always been of age but the whites have failed to recognize it. Nevertheless 80 percent of the correspondents said it is. It may be pointed out, to substantiate further an affirmative answer to the question, that book publishers are frantically trying to reach the market by printing or reprinting books by or about black authors. Dodd, Pocket Book, Knopf, Viking, Scholastic, Arno, Atheneum, Random House, Lippincott, Collier, and many more are trying to fill the need.

John Oliver Killens writing in the *TV Guide* points out that there was a time not many years ago when 25 million black Americans were invisible in the media of mass communication. The black child could go to school and look into his school books and come home and stare at a movie and go through this routine from day to day, month to month, and hardly (if ever) see himself reflected in the "cultural" media. Now he is not invisible. Whether this is a result of black men and women fighting back, protesting, demonstrating, boycotting, or whether it is a result of his coming of age, is problematical.

Teacher Comment

Black literature has always been of age; just recently noticed.

It is symptomatic of the fact that some of the literature written by blacks is quite good, and that literature written by blacks has its rightful place in American literature.

It is symptomatic of a growing awareness of whites for nonwhite literature.

A step in the process. When *they and we* are fully of age, there will be no need for such a question. Blacks and whites are adolescent on this question.

I see very little "coming of age" for blacks in a white racist society.

So far as I am concerned they have lost ground. Before the last few years, I have been empathic with blacks as a whole. Now only with individuals.

Whites are beginning to recognize blacks and their advancing status.

Don't know; perhaps it means nonblacks are growing up.

Is it primarily tokenism?

Hard to say. Probably a "coming" as teen-age revolt is a symptom that maturity has not yet been reached.

Maybe it is not symptomatic of a complete "coming of age" — realistically speaking — but at least it is reflecting a major advancement.

Purposes in Teaching Black Literature and Culture

10. Does the teaching of black literature help to overcome ignorant stereotypes of blacks and their culture? Yes 408 No 23

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Yes	223	134	27	24
No	14	7	1	1

Some people think of blacks as stereotyped images of papier-mâché. Everyone is complex. People who regard others as having only one or two dimensions are not perceptive. Teachers who are enthusiastic about life can lead students to explore beneath the facades that are often presented.

Teacher Comment

As a Black, I taught a unit on Black Literature for five weeks. As a result of this unit, I found that my students had begun to erase some of the stereotyped pictures of the black American and they began to change their attitudes and opinions about many of the black problems. The best gift they gave me, in the way of feedback, was a better understanding of "human relations." This in itself satisfied me more than all the factual knowledge they had acquired from lectures and readings.

I teach in an all-white school in an all-white community. Most students like to think they are unprejudiced, but they have no encounters with the Black Race. It is most difficult to change their stereotyped image of blacks.

It should; I can't prove it.

This community is typical of many throughout the state. It is a sheltered community. My students claim to have no prejudices towards Negroes. I challenge the validity of their statements because in this town without black people they haven't had the experience of knowing anything about black culture. Unfortunately the news media emphasize the

militant blacks, so an appreciation, if not acceptance, of the blacks in our country is difficult.

It could if the students are capable, if the students are open-minded.

I teach in a school of 270 students who are above average in their racial prejudice. The community is highly prejudiced and any teaching of black literature or material about blacks must be *very carefully handled.* In the four years I have been with the system the students' reading has improved as far as approaching literature about blacks is concerned, but I do not teach black literature because I feel I want my job.

I believe it has in other schools where I have taught. I teach now in a very insulated, prejudiced community.

This calls for a positive, enthusiastic approach.

Changing stereotypes is an uncertain proposition. Everyone here knows, for example, that I was raised in Tennessee so they assume that I am anti-Negro. No matter how many times or how many people I tell otherwise and enumerate my civil rights activities to, the general stereotyped assumption prevails. Those few who have bothered to open their ears and actually hear what I have said then assume that I am a stereotyped, wide-eyed liberal (when, in fact, I am a rather conservative Republican).

11. *Does literature chosen portray persons of a minority culture who are unstereotyped human beings with dignity and respect for their own values?* Always 160 Sometimes 251 Never 6

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Always	84	55	12	9
Sometimes	132	85	16	18
Never	4	2	0	0

Thirty-eight percent of teachers responding said the literature chosen always portrays persons of a minority culture who are unstereotyped human beings with dignity and respect for their own values; 60 percent answered "sometimes." The question arises, why shouldn't all literature being taught have this goal as one of its principal objectives?

12. *Do the blacks in your classes believe that the teaching of black literature will somehow solve most of the problems of blacks in a predominantly white school?* Yes 26 No 158
No black teachers 138

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Yes	16	4	1	5
No	74	50	19	15
No black teachers	84	54		

The head of an English department in a large ghetto school (she herself is black) has this to say:

> Most students with whom I have worked do not feel that the teaching of black literature alone will solve most of their problems. For the black student, it serves to deepen their appreciation for their heritage and to build a more positive self-image. Because textbook publishers have ignored or distorted the contribution of black writers in the traditional anthologies for so long, black literature is more enlightening for more white than black students. When this literature is presented in the classroom, the students then are in a position to decide and to be guided to see its value. They are able to make judgments about what is good, fair, or poor literature.

13. *Is the teaching of black literature necessary for blacks who search for self-identity, self-worth?* Yes 359 No 73

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Yes	197	116	24	22
No	43	21	3	6

Eighty-three percent of respondents answered "yes" to the above question.

Teacher Comment

> The teaching of *good* literature, coming from whatever race, will help. I feel we have fine writers in every race.
>
> They may very well find this out on their own, but I believe that teaching helps.
>
> Even though I think literature courses should be all-encompassing, the time for such integrated courses seems to be in the future. Teaching self-identity and self-worth is not the job of an English teacher.
>
> They can learn identity in the streets.

14. Will teaching of black literature give blacks a sense of self-confidence and dignity? Yes 384 No 55

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Yes	197	122	20	28
No	33	15	7	0

Teacher Comment

It is not the only solution to the problem, but it does add to the positive effect.

So will anything they succeed in. Blacks (like the Polish and the Chinese) should be mentioned and studied as relevant. Blacks feel it patronizing to get studied artificially when merit does not make the topic fit in "naturally."

If problems familiar to them are presented along with solutions and inspirations.

In a sense but not necessarily. It'll help.

Not the way we teach black literature.

Either this or more bitterness.

15. Do the readings which you use in literature contribute to the understanding and appreciation of the black American heritage? Yes 367 No 55

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Yes	197	122	20	28
No	33	15	7	0

Teacher Comment

Yes. We teach Booker T. Washington, George Washington Carver, Jackie Robinson.

It does this not so much because of the history but because of the style of writing of many of the black authors; each has a different slant, a different emphasis.

16. Is one of the objectives of black studies to teach life in the ghetto? Yes 196 No 176

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Yes	109	70	10	7
No	92	58	14	12

Teacher Comment

I believe this would stereotype the type — not all blacks live in ghettos.

No, never. The teacher needs to learn about life in the ghetto; the student already knows. (This is from an inner city teacher.)

Hopefully, black studies courses share with our white students a picture of life. These courses stress the fact that black people are human beings with the same faults and attributes as others.

We teach life in the ghetto but only as one mode of life among many.

It must be. Where else do the majority of blacks reside?

As I understand it, heroin is turning ghetto neighborhoods into a no-man's-land. If reading about this danger in such a book as *Manchild in the Promised Land* will be an object lesson to all students, then study of the ghetto should be a main objective.

One downstate teacher says, "We have no ghetto here."

I teach life in the ghetto if the students are whites. I do not teach it for literary purposes.

Not as our suburban school sees it at this point.

In the Social Studies department in our school they teach life in the ghetto. This is not one of the objectives in teaching literature.

17. Is the literature you teach that of the sixties which tends to have either an economic, or revolutionary approach? Yes 160 No 163

Is it historical? Yes 198 No 61

Is it both historical and contemporary? Yes 372 No 29

	Location							
	Downstate		Suburban		Chicago Not Inner City		Chicago Inner City	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Economic and Revolutionary	78	96	62	48	11	12	9	7
Historical	119	23	59	29	13	4	7	5
Historical and Contemporary	203	12	157	12	21	4	21	1

Note: Some teachers checked both the first and third parts of this question.

During the time of the sixties, when there were many black riots, a new literature emerged. Black poems, for example, became serious political statements. There were few blue-sky poems, little felt need for personal reflection. There was a sense of urgency, a statement of social revolution. A study of black literature which is only historical in concept, valuable as that may be, and does not treat the militant and revolutionary aspects is only presenting a fragment of the picture.

It is necessary, however, to have some historical knowledge in order to place the subject in the proper frame of reference. "Those who cannot remember the past," wrote Santayana, "are condemned to repeat it." But at the present when things change so rapidly, many an adolescent dismisses the fact that he has no apparent past, since the past is irrelevant. He may, as Eric Hoffer points out, not see any sense in wasting his time in preparing himself for the future. Tomorrow is now. It is as William A. Kottsmeyer, retired superintendent of schools in St. Louis, has said, "There is no greater inspiration on the face of this earth than to take the raw mind of a child and teach it how to learn." And one of the things we need to teach him is historical perspective.

Teacher Comment

The black literature I have seen of the sixties has been pretty awful. (This quote is from a department head of a school of six hundred.)

But there are only approximately twenty of the eighty teachers on our faculty who would dare to teach literature with an economic or revolutionary approach.

Economic but not revolutionary.

I prefer to use the universal theme of humanity rather than to teach literature with either an economic or revolutionary approach.

18. *Is black literature taught solely or in part to meet social needs?*
Solely 24 In Part 340

Location

	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Solely	11	8	4	1
In Part	181	115	19	25

Teacher Comment

Black literature is not taught to meet social needs. It is taught to ***educate*** children.

I have answered the question "solely." In the midst of a white, bigoted community, I think we must be honest about the real reason.

19. Will the teaching of black literature (Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, W. E. B. DuBois) lead to greater compassion and concern for all people? Yes 236 No 125

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Yes	123	82	13	18
No	73	35	13	4

Some teachers do not understand that there is a black revolution going on. The temper of black writing in the sixties is very different from that before. Even Brooks has become more militant, less subjective. The writing of Malcolm X, Carmichael, and DuBois helps to explain and describe this revolution. Many other black writers could have been listed but these were chosen because they reflect the temper of the times.

Teacher Comment

We teach Malcolm X's autobiography but not Carmichael or DuBois.

We do not teach the authors mentioned. These authors tend to polarize rather than unify.

I hope so, but many prejudices on the part of students must first be overcome.

Not these authors but Langston Hughes and Richard Wright.

The differences between propaganda and literature must be realized in choosing selections to be read.

I question seriously whether Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, and W. E. DuBois write literature. Instead of those three mentioned in the question I would substitute Dunbar, Brooks, Cullen, Hughes.

The three writers mentioned are a special case. The answer to the question depends on the writers that are taught.

As opposed to Conrad, Goethe, Plato?

If we were to use examples listed in #19, we feel we would give fire to segregationists.

I teach these if an atmosphere of compassion and concern has been established in the classroom first.

If handled right and without any interference from the community.

I myself have been repelled by much black literature. The black authors mentioned may be telling the truth but their works do not increase tolerance. Even *Hey, White Girl* I read with a sniff part of the time.

20. What effect does the teaching of black literature have on racial tensions in your school? Increases 18 No effect 181 Reduces 71

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Increases	8	9	1	0
No effect	96	56	15	14
Reduces	38	26	5	2

Teacher Comment

No tensions — all white school. You presume tension exists.

Only if no color differential is made. Present people as people — not as racists.

This is very difficult to determine. Too many factors enter in, especially the attitude of parents at home and of the school community in general.

We have so few blacks that it is not discernible.

The good kids get better and the bad get worse!

It might reduce the feelings of frustration of the black students. This is hard to prove.

21. Does it lead to better understanding of blacks by whites? Yes 300 No 32

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Yes	159	110	18	13
No	17	7	6	2

Teacher Comment

Who knows? Let's hope so.

By some of our students, but this is a highly prejudiced area.

It would but very few white students take the course in black history that is offered in our school.

22. Do you think that white students need black literature as much as or more than the blacks? Not as much as 50 As much as 352 More than 90

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Not as much as	32	13	2	3
As much as	195	114	21	22
More than	49	32	6	3

Teacher Comment

If black literature is good for anybody, it should be as good for whites as blacks.

In our school in the suburban area with 1–2 percent blacks, we need black literature "strongly."

I don't know why it should matter. I don't say, "This is a white author."

What the white students need is not more black literature as such but a more positive attitude toward the blacks from their parents.

23. Do the whites understand what the black authors are saying?
Always 28 Sometimes 486 Never 1

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Always	15	7	3	3
Sometimes	217	231	23	15
Never	1	0	0	0

Teacher Comment

If literature is truly worthwhile, it will be human rather than just black. Therefore, one need not be black to understand it any more than one must be Greek to understand Sophocles. Literature like this will truly break down the barriers of ignorance and prejudice.

Literature is often misinterpreted by many of us regardless of race. It is understood as much as other things are understood.

I do not know whether whites understand what the black authors are saying or not, but I am sure that the blacks have lost in their insistence upon black studies with black teachers.

Add to the above question, "Do the blacks understand what the black authors are saying?"

Whites seem to understand what the blacks are "saying" intellectually — not always emotionally.

Rarely. Hard to understand the ghetto unless a person has lived there.

They do, to the best of my ability as a white M.A. in English deeply concerned with what justice can teach them.

It depends on the individuals and their biases.

As much as they understand any author with or without discussion. The understanding depends on the caliber of the student.

24. Does the teaching of black literature help the blacks to help other blacks? Always 7 Sometimes 230 Never 6

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Always	4	2	0	1
Sometimes	139	58	12	21
Never	5	1	0	0

The teaching of black literature should uncover new interests which might be shared. The student may learn of contributions he can make to others. The reading should help a student to develop meaningful relations. There should develop new expectations and renewed hope when he reads of successes of others of his race. He may learn how others have solved problems similar to his own. Above all, he should have reaffirmed through his reading that one human being is as important as another.

25. Does the presence of black teachers on the faculty present a positive contribution to the overall Afro-American emphasis? Yes 271 No 50 No black teachers 31

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Yes	135	91	21	24
No	33	13	2	2
No black teachers	30	1		

Teacher Comment

No black teachers in a faculty of forty.

We have none but would be more than delighted to hire a good one.

In a school of five thousand we have had two black teachers in eighty years, and those two only briefly.

It is the teacher who makes the difference — be he black or white. A wise teacher will have more of an impact than all of the books at her disposal.

26. Does the teaching of black literature tend to motivate black students who have a negative or indifferent attitude toward all literature? Always 9 Sometimes 238 Never 6

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Always	4	2	0	3
Sometimes	134	68	14	22
Never	4	0	1	1

Teacher Comment

Students are beginning to resent "over-emphasis" on black literature.

Black students sometimes criticize black literature as saying the same things over and over and over.

My black students at all levels like what all kids like!

My one black student's reactions tend to make me think so.

None of the blacks I teach are indifferent.

27. Are black literature selections chosen because of their literary value? Always 96 Usually 234 Sometimes 98 Rarely 10 Never 1

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Always	54	34	5	3
Usually	124	80	15	15
Sometimes	57	29	5	7
Rarely	2	4	3	1
Never	1	0	0	0

You will notice that 22 percent of downstate teachers, 23 percent in the suburbs, 17 percent in Chicago not inner city, and 10 percent inner city teachers responded that they always chose literary selections because of their literary value.

Teacher Comment

I also teach Jewish, Oriental, and Greek works because I insist on quality.

28. Is the black literature you teach separatist in intent?
Yes 19 No 339

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Yes	9	8	0	2
No	186	110	23	20

Only 5 percent of teachers responding felt the black literature they teach to be separatist in intent.

Teacher Comment

I interpret in T. S. Eliot's sense of putting readers in possession of facts they might not otherwise have. If this leads to separatism, so what!

Techniques in Teaching Black Literature

29. In teaching black poetry do you use the oral approach? Yes 360 No 13
Do you read the poems aloud yourself? Yes 340 No 25
Do you have your students read aloud? Yes 304 No 29
Do you use recordings? Yes 315 No 38

	Location							
	Downstate		Suburban		Chicago Not Inner City		Chicago Inner City	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Oral approach	190	11	126	1	19	1	25	0
Yourself	184	11	116	9	19	1	21	4
Student	148	17	113	9	19	2	24	1
Recordings	161	22	118	8	15	4	21	4

Questions 29 through 36 were placed in the questionnaire not only to find what is being done throughout Illinois but also to call to the attention of English teachers some practices that have proved successful. Teachers might well want to examine the implications of these questions and consider whether or not they are applicable to the classroom situations in which they find themselves.

By viewing the above table, one may see that an overwhelming percentage of teachers use the oral approach. This is important for the language of the ghetto is so expressive and poetic that a great deal of the meaning is lost if a selection (especially a poetic one) is read silently and silently alone. In silent reading

1. The inflection is lost.
2. There is no bodily animation.
3. The faces do not reflect the meaning.
4. The melody pattern is lost.
5. If the inflection and melody patterns are altered, the entire meaning may be changed.

We recognize, too, that blacks very often may use inflections and melody patterns different from those of whites. They love to emote.

When oral reading is included, it should serve a purpose that is considered worthwhile by both the teacher and the students alike.

30. Does literature chosen have language readily understandable by the disadvantaged? Yes 256 No 79

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Yes	153	69	14	20
No	47	23	5	4

Any English teacher with experience will know that students who have mastered reading skills by the time they enter high school can probably read with understanding, those who have not, cannot. It is most discouraging in senior high school to have classes of students who are still reading on a third and fourth grade level. One of the chief problems, then, as any competent English teacher knows, is to find reading material suitable for such retarded readers, material that fits in with a student's level of development as well as his reading level.

Teachers and librarians in such schools as Southeast High School in Springfield and Eisenhower High School in Decatur have selected many titles for the retarded, and these books are readily available by single titles and in sets. John DeBoer, in his excellent text, *The Teaching of Reading* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), points out the availability of a large number of trade books on subjects of great interest to children and written so simply that even a retarded reader can enjoy them.

The Peoria Public Schools have issued a booklet titled *The Negro in Literature*. In the introduction to this appears the following statement which is of interest in this study.

Teachers often find students of minority groups rejecting literature because it has no appeal and no relevance to them. The problem of such rejection has many facets. Knowledge of individual student reading levels and interests is one facet. Another is that some students feel teachers know little about minority groups and, therefore, do not use reading materials that have more appeal. In most cases, however, the teachers are simply using text materials available and often seem unaware that these materials have very little appeal.

Several teachers in interviews pointed out that the literature chosen does not always have language readily understandable by the disadvantaged. This may be so even though students enter a high school from the same elementary schools and have had the same teachers as those who have developed skills in reading. The question arises then why so many of the disadvantaged are poor readers. Several reasons for this have been advanced: (1) there is nothing in the home environment to encourage reading; (2) there is often a lack of reading material at home; (3) there is often no father image — no authority image; (4) the student may be reluctant to accept authority on the part of the teacher; (5) if these students do not have sufficient food at home or decent clothes to wear, they may be preoccupied with that; (6) they are in class for an insufficient time to overcome poor learning habits they form the remainder of the day.

Teacher Comment

Since this is a private school, none of our students are economically disadvantaged and most of them are socially quite well adjusted, too.

Even the "advantaged" students have trouble with poetic language.

Not always. James Baldwin, for example, is quite erudite.

Not all of them, certainly. The *Invisible Man* cannot be understood by the really disadvantaged pupil but, of course, language alone is not the real problem.

Some of the literature by Africans or Afro-Americans is difficult for high school students' interpretation. Most of them read on the physical plane only and conclude that the writers are all saying what they already know, in the case of black students. The whites are either interested, fascinated, or bored.

The majority of the students wish to explore literature by all ethnic groups in order to broaden their horizons and understanding of their world; the minority wishes only to read that type of literature which reinforces ideology gained outside the school setting. They do not want to evaluate and interpret. Therefore, some of the literature can speak for itself and some must be interpreted if students are to gain the most from it. Both techniques must be employed.

31. Is individual reading of black authors (aside from general class assignments) encouraged? Yes 408 No 69

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Yes	227	132	21	28
No	49	15	5	0

This question implies the use of a varied collection of reading matter with little reliance on an anthology. The major emphasis is on student needs and desires. If individual reading is encouraged, there should be ample time for the student to read and to share ideas with the class, and there should be an adequate system of record keeping. Even then individualized reading, as Leland Jacobs points out in *Individualizing Reading Practices,* is "not a panacea for all of the ills of teaching reading" for any student, be he black or white. All such a program can hope to do is to encourage a student to read books which he probably would not have touched before and perhaps even to develop a love for books which will carry over to the time when he has completed his formal education.

Teacher Comment

Just as any good literature is recommended. I teach black authors with merit.

What difference does the *color* of the *author* make on *good literature?*

The unit on black literature in our school is *largely* independent study.

There is *very little* black literature available to students, so not much is read.

But only if the student has found an active reading interest. I encourage their interests first then supplement their reading list.

Personalized learning is one of the big goals of today's education. How else can students work but individually? I encourage my students to use not only the school library but also the facilities of the local public library. "The right experience for the right student at the right time," is an important concept in the teaching of English.

In order to provide flexibility not found in standard text books, many schools furnish, for optional use by teachers, supplementary books. These books enable a teacher to present materials that are relevant both to the needs and abilities of particular students. They often relate to current problems and circumstances.

Our library has an extensive collection of books by black authors. English teachers in our school constantly refer students to these books.

32. Do you have interest or ability groups within the class in which black authors might be studied by one group and not by others? Yes 233 No 200

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Yes	118	90	11	14
No	123	58	11	8

Fifty-six percent of teachers say they have ability groups within a class in which black authors might be studied by one group and not by others. This percentage would indicate that grouping within a class has its limitations or all teachers would use it. For one thing teachers will recognize that there are individual differences that remain within the group. If different materials are used, even within the group, the preparation of the teacher is increased. With the class size such as it is in many schools, and with the teacher load far exceeding 100 pupils and 4 classes, teachers may find this additional work too burdensome. Valuable as individualized instruction may be, many teachers find it is almost impossible under present conditions.

Teacher Comment

We have no Negro students and the only literature we offer is in anthologies which have very few Negro authors included.

Especially during independent study projects.

I use ability groups within the class for specific group projects.

33. Do you suggest readings to an individual student which tend to satisfy a special need and which are on his reading level? Yes 432 No 20

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Yes	236	146	25	25
No	14	5	1	0

Teacher Comment

Not to any great extent. Crowdedness doesn't allow it.

I bought quite a selection of books by black authors to loan to students. Since I share a room with another teacher and I do not have locked cabinets, I lost half of the books in the first month.

I lend my copies of black literature to any student who is interested.

Students are encouraged to read novels by black authors for book reports.

I teach from an anthology. If it has black literature in it, I teach it.

This is a school of six hundred students. We have books by only three black writers in the school library.

At present we have very few books by black authors. We hope to add several paperbacks written by blacks to be used for additional book reports. When we purchase new anthologies, we will look for those with black literature included.

Students choose any black author they wish. The ones most frequently chosen are Carmichael, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King. These are the books that I would never "teach" in class because of their militancy and profanity (exception, M. L. King's), but I allow students to read them on their own and report on them.

Generally we suggest readings to an individual student to satisfy a special need. Sometimes this material is beyond his ability but he may force himself to read.

I have found that care needs to be exercised not to devote too much time to one student to the neglect of the able reader. No one in class should be deprived of the attention he is entitled to.

34. *Do you let the literature speak for itself or do you interpret it?*
Speak for itself 169 Interpret 160 Both 171

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Itself	128	30	7	4
Interpret	92	41	17	10
Both	89	69	3	10

"One of the most significant comprehension skills is that of making critical evaluations of what is read." This statement by John DeBoer in *The Teaching of Reading* is important. It is the temptation of the teacher to do all or most of the interpretation for the student. Whether this is a lack of patience on the part of the teacher, or a lack of time, better pedagogy is to teach the student to read critically for himself. Dr. DeBoer (pp. 185-86 of the above mentioned text) lists eighteen "General Abilities." These include:

1. The ability to read and understand a variety of reading materials.
2. The ability to question as one reads.
3. The ability to continue reading until one has gathered enough information to reach a complete answer.
4. The ability to see relationships.

5. The ability to see the difference between an author's factual statements and the author's opinion.
6. The ability to recognize when an author has omitted facts or information necessary for an honest, complete understanding.

Teacher Comment

I like to have the literature speak for itself, but when students are in doubt I help with the interpretation. I always do so if I am asked.

I only interpret when the students can't mount it.

Depends on the learning situation. My interpretation varies with the reading skill of the students and the purposes for which the reading is intended.

Interpretation is usually a class project using tools of critical reading. Modern pieces have an easier time standing alone.

My goal is to have the literature speak for itself to students so it will be meaningful to them and so they may interpret it according to their own needs and thoughts.

35. *Are writings about blacks by whites included?* Yes 318 No 84

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Yes	175	101	17	25
No	47	27	7	3

Seventy-eight percent of English teachers responding to this question said they use writings about blacks by whites. There is little reason why such material should not be taught. Anthologies contain many such selections, although many of these are biased. Several generations of Americans have read and enjoyed Mark Twain's masterpiece, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Many teachers are using with success *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, *Member of the Wedding* by Carson McCullers, and *Cry, the Beloved Country* by Alan Paton.

36. Do you omit selections that refer to the following:

drugs?	Yes 22	No 408
sex?	Yes 47	No 378
policemen?	Yes 16	No 413
religion?	Yes 21	No 408
profanity?	Yes 53	No 372
militancy?	Yes 40	No 385
white-inflicted atrocities?	Yes 34	No 375

Location

	Downstate		Suburban		Chicago Not Inner City		Chicago Inner City	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
drugs	14	228	6	133	2	22	0	25
sex	29	208	12	127	6	18	0	25
policemen	11	230	5	134	0	24	0	25
religion	14	225	6	135	1	23	0	25
profanity	36	200	10	130	6	18	1	24
militancy	24	213	12	127	3	21	1	24
atrocities	21	200	7	132	5	19	1	24

The overwhelming disposition of teachers to use materials regardless of subject matter is one of the most interesting findings in the study. (It might be pointed out that this permissiveness was not nearly as apparent in private conversations with teachers.) In "Teacher Comment" to follow you will note several qualifications to "yes" and "no" answers in the questionnaire.

As is true with tabulations of all questions in this questionnaire, it would be possible to inundate the reader with figures and percentages. While these facts might be of interest to some, the readability for many would be diminished. In regard to Question 36, it might be noted, however, that 15 percent of downstate teachers would omit selections regarded as profane, 8 percent of suburban teachers would omit these, but only 4 percent of inner city teachers would. The size of the school does not seem to make any appreciable difference (13 percent of teachers in schools of 100–200, and 12 percent of schools over 1000 would omit material regarded as profane).

In regard to sex the size of the school seems to be a factor. Only 2 percent of teachers in schools of 100–200 compared with 12 percent in schools of 1000 or more would eliminate books dealing with sex. The location of the school is a factor. The above

table shows that 12 percent of downstate teachers, and 8 percent of suburban teachers have reservations. No inner city teacher reported such.

David Demarest presents the case for the use of profanity in the classroom in *Clearing House* of October, 1970. He says that the use of slang and profanity may "be a means of showing the teacher's respect for the student's experience, a means of making the student feel more at home in the classroom." (With this point of view the author of this study disagrees most emphatically.)

Vincent Canby has pointed out, "In a society where tastelessness and vulgarity are inalienable rights, I am not sure that prohibiting an adult's access to obscenity is unconstitutional."

Teacher Comment

I don't teach such filth as *Soul on Ice*. I think this degrades the black as well as the white.

I don't skip anything! It's what it is!

We use *Ebony* magazine as a part of nonfiction — so all are included.

I do like to omit obscenities because they offend me, not the student.

Omissions *only* as they might further jeopardize the black image in our all-white town and school.

We do not omit a selection because it includes these matters. We choose a piece because it seems of real value, it has a message that seems true, and we feel we can teach it.

Our community feels that sex and profanity are unnecessary in the classroom. One board member was displeased to see Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in the library.

Never omitted on the basis mentioned, only if it gives offense to blacks and whites. Works used omit extremes.

We avoid sexually abnormal stuff — probably would avoid class use of books and subjects that would arouse strong community backlash. Such books could and would be read by individuals.

Books are selected according to sophistication of group.

I teach literature, not mish-mash or propagandic pamphlets.

Such categories as you have listed must be tastefully presented.

Why is it that the evil, ugly, shocking, threatening aspects of life always seem to get more attention than the righteous, beautiful, comforting, and reassuring aspects of life?

To teach literature as life (#36 and #37), a degree of objectivity is necessary so that students can gain enough insight to decide upon a pattern of behavior or assume an ideology that they deem feasible in terms of their own lives and experiences. Considering the changes in social mores and the language changes taking place constantly, the subjects of drugs, sex, religion, etc., must be explored on the classroom level if the teacher is to deal honestly with those things pertinent to the lives of

the students. My experience has been that students do not appreciate street-level discussions in the classroom.

The fact of sexual incidents or profanity appearing should not automatically disqualify a book or other medium. Rather the decision should be made on the basis of whether the medium presents life in its true proportions, whether circumstances are realistically dealt with, and whether the medium is of literary and educational value. The level of the student should also be taken into consideration. — *Policy of Rochelle Township High School*

Objections Resolved

37. *Is there a danger that the teaching of black literature will provide black nationalists with evidence they need for a negative nationalism based on hatred?* Yes 94 No 218

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Yes	50	29	10	5
No	125	71	8	14

Teacher Comment

Anything used wrongly can be harmful, and many teachers are misreading black literature.

Study would not effect hatred. I think it would have only a positive effect.

There is always a danger that knowledge will lead to informed action where it is needed. It is better than hiding the truth.

A reader sees what he wants to see. He interprets a piece of literature the way he wants to interpret it.

Of course. But isn't that what we accept when we accept free speech? I think the alternative presents even greater "dangers."

Possibly, but not if handled intelligently.

Certainly the Carmichaels, Rap Browns, Bobby Seales, and Eldridge Cleavers have made this clear, if one considers their writings as black "literature."

However, people needing ammunition to attack another side tend to use even the most innocent material.

The answer to this depends on the texts that are used and the capability of the teacher. The chance is always present.

I am afraid it might, so I don't teach black literature.

If it's always to be *separate* literature, and if the selections chosen are aimed toward building hatred.

38. *Is there a danger that black scholars teaching black studies will manipulate data, bias their studies, and create their own myths much as many whites have done with theirs?*
Frequently 53 Sometimes 296 Never 11

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Frequently	32	14	5	2
Sometimes	172	93	15	16
Never	5	3	0	3

Teacher Comment

Without a skillful and knowledgeable approach, the students and, might I add the teacher, may easily manipulate data so that all negative and prejudiced attitudes, rather than knowledge and understanding, may prevail.

The deciding factor in this question is the word "scholar." This could happen, but I wouldn't call the teacher a scholar.

But the *risk* must be taken.

This has happened in our school district but should not be regarded as the general rule.

The classroom is the best forum for teachers to discuss and exchange ideas under the guidance and direction of the teacher. With this kind of exploration and honesty, there is little danger of #37 and #38 posing any real problem — for the majority.

I don't believe that many whites have done this. Some have and some blacks may do so.

Perhaps, but the same risk is present for white scholars creating their own myths.

We all influence from personal bias.

Anything is possible given a poor teacher to help it along. But it is as Milton said, a judicious reader can take even a bad book and use it to discover, to confute, to forewarn, and to illustrate.

That's one way in which we are all alike, unfortunately, for both of us.

They wouldn't be human if they didn't. Do you know anybody who doesn't have a bias about something?

It depends on the scholar and his prejudices.

Individual black or white teachers may be subject to bias.

This is a human tendency; when one is aware of it, it will be suppressed by most.

39. Are accepted standards and scholarship maintained in a black studies program? Always 92 Usually 101 Sometimes 43 Never 6

	Location			
	Downstate	Suburban	Chicago Not Inner City	Chicago Inner City
Always	37	44	5	6
Usually	50	32	6	13
Sometimes	27	12	3	1
Never	3	2	1	0

There is no codified body of accepted standards in scholarship. Most teachers answering this question seem to have standards which they use in evaluating students' work. We are living in a time of shifting standards. This is not only true in the secondary schools but in the universities as well.

Teacher Comment

I don't know whether they are or not but I do know there is an immediate need for restoration of sanity in scholarship. To teach a book just because it happens to be written by a black and for no other reason isn't sound scholarship no matter how you look at it.

If standards are lowered, we are in effect saying "you are inferior."

Actually, I have no black students. I expect my intellectually poor whites to raise their standards and do not expect the standards to be lowered for them.

One of the duties of a teacher is to throw down a challenge to her students, not to lower standards to accommodate them. The challenge must be within the power of the student to realize.

At Willowbrook anyway!

Further Teacher Insights

Personal insights into the teaching of black literature by teachers in schools with a large percentage of blacks are especially valuable. The following points were made in conversations with some of these administrators and teachers.

East St. Louis (70 percent black)

1. Some blacks want a militant teacher — they don't want a moderate teacher.
2. It makes little difference whether a teacher is black or white so long as he is a good teacher. Personalities are all important. An insensitive teacher is worthless.

3. There should be more in-service training in black literature — few know it.
4. Blacks should not be free to do their own thing. Since they live in a society, they must be able to get along with all people. A Negro dialect is to be discouraged; a standard dialect is essential if blacks are to get along in society.
5. Black literature courses are not favored. In East St. Louis they favor an integrated approach.
6. In East St. Louis they are working out a multi-ethnic course to include literature from all minority groups.

Evanston Township High School (60 percent black)

A complete discussion of the Afro-American literature course of Evanston Township High School may be found in the November, 1970, *Illinois English Bulletin*. Here are some highlights of the Evanston program.

1. The Afro-American literature course is totally different in its approach.
2. The activities which are most successful are those that break down barriers and encourage students to relate to each other.
3. There is a sense of freedom of expression. A pupil might use the experiences he has encountered through his literature and in his daily living.
4. One of the most important components of the course is that of role playing. Many excellent dramatizations of rather dramatic situations serve to reach many of the students.
5. There is team teaching — three or four teachers may teach their specialty — drama, poetry, fiction. At many points they stress interplay and interaction. They teach a good deal of poetry where they use the oral approach. Students are encouraged to read aloud, to be animated, to use many gestures, and even shout, if that is called for.
6. Some black literature is taught in every course.
7. Evanston, as in East St. Louis, is working on a multi-ethnic course for all minorities.

Kenwood High School — Chicago (65 percent black)

1. There is no course in black literature as such. When black literature is taught, students might say, "When will we get back to other literature?" or, "All black authors seem to go in circles."

2. The consensus seems to be that if they had a course in one minority group, they would have to have courses in all minorities — Irish, Polish, Mexican. As in East St. Louis and Evanston, Kenwood is interested in the multi-ethnic approach to literature.
3. Those who will not read, will not read black literature any more than white. Many students were given Richard Wright's *Black Boy* to read. They were excited at first and then many lost interest.
4. What is taught doesn't have to be "relevant" in the current narrow sense of the word.
5. Readings shouldn't be militant. (This feeling was expressed in conversations with other teachers in nearly all black schools.) Teachers feel that is all some students would need to riot in the hair-trigger situations in which they find themselves. These teachers feel that if they are going to teach any English at all, they must teach in an atmosphere free from disruption.

A teacher in another large ghetto school had this to say about the teaching of black literature:

> I find it is best to avoid literature which arouses hatred or anger either in a black or a white student. Students of both races resent this also. I know of one teacher, white, who thought he could win the sympathy of black students by showing them his understanding of white mistreatment of the blacks. All the literature he taught was about white mistreatment of the blacks. One black student became almost violent because of this, and demanded that the teacher teach about *dignity* and *love*.
>
> My purpose in teaching black literature is to show that blacks can create interesting and beautiful literature as well as whites. I carefully choose the literature, and I avoid hostile, hate-filled writing.
>
> Furthermore, I have had students tell me that they had been satiated with black literature and culture, and preferred universal themes rather than racial ones. I personally have found that black students feel you appreciate them when you show an appreciation and knowledge of their lovely art, their poetry, and their humor.

Books Most Often Taught

There were more than one hundred teachers who included book lists or individual titles of books used by themselves or by the English Department in their respective schools. The books most often mentioned appear in the following list of twenty.

Baldwin, James	*Blues for Mister Charlie*
	The Fire Next Time
	Go Tell It on the Mountain
Bonham, Frank	*Durango Street*
Brooks, Gwendolyn	*Selected Poems*
Cleaver, Eldridge	*Soul on Ice*
Davis, Sammy, Jr.	*Yes I Can*
Ellison, Ralph	*Invisible Man*
Fairbairn, Ann	*Five Smooth Stones*
Gregory, Dick	*Nigger: An Autobiography*
Griffin, John H.	*Black Like Me*
Hansberry, Lorraine	*Raisin in the Sun*
King, Martin Luther, Jr.	*Why We Can't Wait*
Lee, Harper	*To Kill a Mockingbird*
Malcolm X	*The Autobiography of Malcolm X*
McCullers, Carson	*Member of the Wedding*
Parks, Gordon	*The Learning Tree*
Walker, Margaret	*Jubilee*
Wright, Richard	*Black Boy*
	Native Son